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Peek At The Invisible

The questions raised in a House of Representatives subcommittee hearing on the apparent use of a private foundation as a channel for secret expenditures of the Central Intelligence Agency should be disturbing to American citizens. It provides a small and rare glimpse of the ramifications of the enormous "invisible government" that has developed under the cloak of the CIA.

The phrase is borrowed from the book, "The Invisible Government", by David Wise and Thomas B. Ross (Random House, 1964). This study in depth of the foreign and domestic tentacles of the CIA reveals that the agency makes considerable use of private foundations, public and private universities and other institutions.

CIA secretly finances research programs at some universities, using foundations as a "cover" to hide the source of the funds. Some universities won't accept secret projects. CIA has ways of getting around this. Harvard University has such scruples, but some of its faculty members have served CIA by channeling their work through the Center for International Studies at nearby Massachusetts Institute of Technology. That center was established with a grant from CIA in 1950. It operates with the same cloak-and-dagger trappings that characterize the secluded CIA headquarters near Washington, D.C.

There has been opposition among academicians to CIA operations in the universities; the threat to academic freedom is obvious. But the CIA has apparently found little trouble in finding willing recipients of grants for its secret work.

The extent of CIA domestic operations—all off the record—is indicated by the spread of its local offices. Portland has no CIA listing, but Seattle, Denver, San Francisco and Los Angeles are among a score or so cities that do.

There is no valid reason for public suspicion of the J. M. Kaplan Fund, mentioned in the subcommittee hearings, or of any other foundations or institutions cooperating with CIA. In fact, one need not question the motives of U.S. intelligence—all presumably in the best interest of U.S. security—to question the existence in our democracy of a secret cell of government, which has at its disposal hundreds of millions of dollars annually for which there is never a public accounting.

Only at odd times does the public have even the smallest word of this monster's operations—when it falls on its nose in planning and executing the Bay of Pigs fiasco, when it gets bogged down in the domestic politics of South Viet Nam, when a U-2 spy plane crashes, when it is caught in bookkeeping hocus-pocus by a House subcommittee whose chief concern is the nation's small business.

CIA is big, big business by the very nature of its assignment to keep the U.S. government informed of the intentions and capabilities of all possible enemies. But how is the nation it ostensibly serves ever to know who is actually served, and how, if CIA is to enjoy complete license and immunity? President Eisenhower assumed responsibility for a disastrous CIA bobble on one occasion, President Kennedy on the other. Meanwhile, the rest of us have managed to learn enough to conclude that CIA has by no means confined itself to its intelligence mission. It is out of its field and it may very well be out of hand. How is one to know?